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The University of Dayton

News Release

Dec. 13, 1991
Contact: Teri Rizvi

TEENAGERS SEE MOTHER OF JESUS AS LARGER THAN LIFE, ADULTS RELATE TO MARY AS MOTHER OR FRIEND, SURVEY SHOWS

DAYTON, Ohio -- They've been called a visually sophisticated generation, raised on films and MTV. But college and high school students still like their religious art realistic.

That's a finding of a "Marian Art Survey" conducted by the University of Dayton's International Marian Research Institute (IMRI).

The survey of high school students, college students and adults (with an average age of 40) also indicated that our perception of Mary, the mother of Jesus, changes as we mature.

In choosing among artistic representations from various styles and periods, all age groups preferred accessible, attractive images of Mary. Adults chose a pre-Raphaelite Madonna and Child as their favorite; college seniors, a Renaissance Madonna; and high school freshmen, a Baroque Mary. Ranking at the bottom of all the groups' lists: Byzantine icons, Romanesque art and 20th-century Expressionism. These three styles, according to IMRI director the Rev. Johann Roten, S.M., "may appear too harshly categorical and uncomfortably absolute."

How Mary is perceived as a person changes as we age. Most of the high school freshmen surveyed, according to Roten, see Mary as "larger than life--more of an image than a woman. The images I drew from their descriptions is Mary as holy, with no difficulties, peaceful, calm settings--beautiful but slightly unreal."

This perception, Roten says, gradually changes with years to the point that, with the adults surveyed, "Mary finally becomes a woman who can be related to."

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"The women seemed able to relate to Mary as a mother, friend and sister--someone who shared experiences they had been through," he said. "Mary no longer is a model that is almost impossible to live up to, but the most complete expression of what it means to be a woman and mother.

"The men seemed to see her in a more abstract way, but the image is no longer someone royal, but more of a concept of how a Christian should be."

The International Marian Research Institute was founded in 1975 at the University of Dayton in affiliation with the Roman Pontifical Theological Faculty Marianum to facilitate and encourage Marian studies in the United States and abroad. IMRI enables students to prepare for the licentiate of sacred theology (S.T.L.) and the doctorate of sacred theology (S.T.D.) with specialization in Mariology, to earn a certificate in Marian studies or to work toward a master's degree in religious studies with specialization in Mariology (a joint program with UD's department of religious studies).

The University of Dayton is also home to the Marian Library, which contains the world's largest and most comprehensive collection of printed materials on Mary. Established in 1943, it holds more than 70,000 books and pamphlets in more than 50 languages dating as far back as the 15th century.

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For interviews, call **Father Johann Roten, S.M.**, (513) 229-4257.